

August 21st, 2016

## THE HAPPY GOSPEL FOR HELPLESS SHEEP

John 10:1-10

The happy gospel for helpless sheep. There is a danger in attaching the word *happy* to the gospel in our day and age. Some of us hear the word happy and think “superficial” or worse “narcissistic.” For others it can sound like a version of the prosperity gospel, that if we come to Jesus then we get more stuff—namely, better health, and more wealth. And this doesn’t seem to square with statements that Jesus made: “In the world you will have tribulation.” (John 16:33) Many of us have experienced greater hardships after we became Christians than when we were unbelievers. We know better than to tell our unbelieving friends that if they just believe in Christ, then everything will go well for them. So there is a danger in calling the gospel “happy.”

However there is a greater danger, in my opinion, in not using the phrase happy gospel because of what Jesus says in John 10:10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it *abundantly*.” Jesus did not come *merely* to give us everlasting life. As if we simply have more time to fill in our existence. He came to give us an *abundant life*. Abundant means “over and above...more than is necessary...something further...all surpassing...overflowing.” In other words, what Jesus promises in the gospel, is overflowing happiness. That’s why the gospel is good news.

### *The Big Idea...*

The gospel promises us abundant life, but we must enter through Christ to obtain it

In our passage today, Jesus is contrasting two different gospels and two different shepherds. The first shepherd brings the gospel of moralism, of self-reliance. The problem is, sheep are not self-reliant. They are utterly dependent, and therefore this gospel brings death. The second shepherd—Christ Himself—lays down His life because He knows His sheep are helpless to save themselves. And in giving us Himself, He gives us abundant life.

- ☆ Jesus is the Only Shepherd of this Gospel (gathering a flock)
- ☆ Jesus is the Only Door of this Gospel (*for* a definite purpose)

## I. Jesus is the Only Shepherd of this Gospel

### **The Pharisees (ch.9) are the thieves and robbers (ch.10)**

At first glance, chapter ten looks like it has nothing to do with chapter nine. Chapter nine dealt with Jesus healing the man born blind, and now chapter ten begins with Jesus talking about sheep and shepherds and robbers. However the text gives us blaring evidence that Jesus is continuing the same conversation with the Pharisees. First of all, look at v.19-21 in chapter ten.

There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?” Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. **Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?**”

Secondly, consider that there is not a transitional statement between the end of chapter nine and the beginning of chapter ten.

[40] Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” [41] Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ **your guilt remains.** [1] “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a **thief and a robber.**

The Pharisees are guilty (9:41). Why? Because they are thieves and robbers (10:1). They were acting as the shepherds of Israel, but they would refused to enter the sheepfold by *the door*, meaning, Christ.

Finally, we see that 10:1-21 serves as a vivid word picture describing the events in chapter nine. The man born blind, one of Jesus’ own sheep, was abused by the Pharisees and kicked out of the synagogue. His place among God’s people was stolen from him by thieves and robbers. What does Jesus do? He comes to the man born blind at the end of chapter nine, calls him and leads him out, and the man follows Jesus because he is one of his sheep. The man refused to follow the false shepherds of Israel because they were strangers (v.5) and instead he followed the voice of the Shepherd (v.4).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is not the first time that Scripture compares false teachers to thieves and robbers. In Ezekiel 34, God rebukes the teachers of Israel for abusing His people. And He uses the language of sheep and shepherds. Ezekiel 34:2-5: “Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? [3] You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. [4] The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. [5] So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered;”

So we cannot divorce the beginning of chapter ten from nine. These first 21 verses of chapter ten are a vivid word picture of the events of chapter nine. Jesus is saying that anyone who rejects the gospel, and who teaches others to do the same, is a thief and a robber. Christ rejecters are people destroyers.

### The imagery of sheep

Before we get explain the rest of our text, we have to ask: why does Jesus use the imagery of sheep? Why does Jesus call His people sheep, and Himself as their shepherd? Jesus doesn't call us horses or cows, He calls us sheep. Why? What is it about sheep that we find our closet kinship with them? Many have answered stupidity, or stubbornness, or their mob instinct, or that they are timid or perverse. True. Sheep are all those things. And we have those in common with them. But their greatest characteristic is their *absolute helplessness*. More than any other class of livestock, sheep are absolutely dependent upon the watchful eye and meticulous care of their shepherd.<sup>2</sup>

Psalm 23 says "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures." Notice it says "*He* makes me lie down." Sheep cannot rest on their own unless the Shepherd provides four important things for them. First, sheep must be free fear. Sheep are so timid that "...even a stray jackrabbit suddenly bounding from behind a bush can stampede a whole flock."<sup>3</sup> But when the sheep hear the voice of their shepherd and see His presence with them with His rod and His staff, they can be free from fear.

Secondly, they must be free from the rivalry with other sheep. Just as chickens have a "pecking order", sheep have what's called a "butting order" where the stronger sheep will thrust and butt others in order to establish dominancy. But if this rivalry is not dealt with, the weaker sheep will not be able to rest. The Lord speaks to this through the prophet Ezekiel

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<sup>2</sup> Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), pg. 20-21

<sup>3</sup> Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), pg. 36

“Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep.” Ezekiel 34:20-22

It is the Shepherd’s presence alone that puts an end to all rivalry.<sup>4</sup>

Thirdly, the sheep must be free from pests. Sheep suffer from nose flies, and other life-threatening parasites. These pests drive the sheep crazy causing them to shake their heads incessantly and stomp their feet. Only the good Shepherd can remove these pests by anoint their heads with oil (Psalm 23:5).

Lastly, the sheep must be free from hunger. Sheep cannot rest if they are hungry. The good Shepherd must painstakingly remove all the rocks from their pasture, provide irrigation for the fields, plow the land and plant seeds. Additionally the Shepherd lead them to quiet streams, which often involves him having to damn up a little pool for them so that the sheep will come near it to drink. If left to themselves the sheep will drink from polluted puddles and pick up parasites like liver flukes or nematodes.

**The *main* characteristic of sheep is *not* that they are dumb but that they are dependent.** Without an ever-present Shepherd anticipating our needs, providing for our food, and protection, stopping rivalry, and preventing pests and diseases from overcoming us, we will perish. It is the shepherd alone is who makes the difference in our destiny.<sup>5</sup>

### **Jesus gathers and shepherds his own sheep (v.2-4)**

That is the contrast that Jesus is drawing between Himself and the false shepherds of Israel. The Pharisees were horrible shepherds to the man born blind. They saw helplessness and despised it. They wouldn’t bind his wounds with the free grace of the gospel. Their gospel was performance. Their gospel

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, pg. 42

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, pg. 28-29

was moralism, do-good-ism, law-keeping. Their gospel was 'I can do this and be right with God.' They failed to see themselves as helpless sheep.

Beloved, this is the first principle of the gospel: **You and I are helpless, powerless, and dependent sheep and we never stop being that way. We will never graduate from being sheep. Ever.** Believing the gospel does not make us stronger, more independent, more self-sufficient. Believing the gospel makes us see our weakness, our dependence, and our insufficiency. If we become stronger, more independent, and more self-sufficient, that is evidence that we are not believing the gospel (at least in those moments)

What do we see Jesus describing in this metaphor? His sufficiency for us! v.2-4

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

What is Jesus doing in this passage? He is gathering His sheep. In chapter nine, Jesus gathered the man born blind as one of his own sheep. The man recognized Jesus' voice and believed in Christ. Why? Because he was one of his sheep. Look ahead at v.26. Jesus tells the Jews why they wouldn't believe Christ: "You do not believe *because* you are not part of my flock." He didn't say that you are not part of my flock because you don't believe, but the opposite! 'My sheep believe because they are my sheep first! You don't believe because you don't belong to Me.'

This is what grace is. Belief in the gospel comes solely and only because Christ has made us his sheep first. We hear his voice and believe, because He has already claimed us as His sheep from eternity past. We follow him and not the voice of false shepherds because we do not recognize them.

When little lambs are first born into the world, the first voice they hear is their shepherd. He takes the shaking newborn into his gentle hands, and warms her, cleans her, caresses her, speaks with her in his soft voice. It's his voice that

awakens the tiny lamb's little ear drums.<sup>6</sup> His voice imprinted on her mind. It's his voice that gathers her when she goes astray. It's his voice that calms her when predators are near. It's his voice that saves her from all the dangers of this world. Christ awakened the man born blind with His voice, and the man followed him, because Jesus was his shepherd. Ezekiel 34:22-23

[22] I will rescue my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. [23] And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd...[31] And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord GOD."

### **The blindness of the Pharisees (v.6)**

How do the Pharisees respond to this? v.6 "This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them." Why didn't they understand? Because they were not His sheep. They could not believe because Jesus did not call them by name. Jesus did not call them into His flock.

## **II. Jesus is the Only Door of this Gospel**

### **The expansion of the figure of speech**

v.7 So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

On the surface, v.7-10 seem to confusing because it looks like Jesus is now explaining the word picture in v.1-5. However now He's called the door instead of the shepherd. And then He calls Himself the shepherd again in v. 11. So what's going on? Well v.7-10 are not an explanation of v.1-5 but rather an expansion of the metaphor. As a Shepherd, Jesus is explaining that He takes

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<sup>6</sup> Lynn Anderson, *They Smell Like Sheep*, (West Monroe, LA.,: Howard Publishing Co.), pg. 19-20

care of us and nurtures us. As a Door, Jesus is telling us that He is the only way to the Father. As **John 14:6** says “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except *through* me.” Nobody can get to God unless they go through Jesus Christ.

Ancient eastern shepherds would often have to build make shift pens for their sheep to lie down in at night. They would gather brush, and rocks, and build these barricades several feet high. There was only one opening in these little fortresses, and the shepherd would lie down to sleep right at the opening. He stretched himself out blocking the entrance so that sheep could not go out. “...the shepherd literally, *physically became the door!*”<sup>7</sup> No predator could get in unless they killed the Shepherd first.

And this is exactly what Jesus alludes to in v.11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd *lays down his life* for the sheep.” In order to keep us safe, Jesus must die. No other shepherd will do this. All other shepherds who refuse to go through Jesus are thieves and destroyers.

### **All who come before me are thieves and robbers**

v.8 *All who came before me* are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. v.10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

When Jesus says “all who came before me” he doesn’t mean that the prophets like Moses, or Isaiah, or John the Baptist were thieves and robbers. Jesus himself said in John 5:46 “...if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.” Jesus affirmed the ministry of these prophets because they pointed to Christ as the only door. What Jesus means by saying “All who came before me” is ‘anyone who tries to stand in the place of Me, of my *door-ness*, is a

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, pg. 20-21

thief and a murderer and a destroyer.’ False gospels only bring death.<sup>8</sup> Anyone or anything that stands in the place of Christ’s work in our lives is a destroyer.

## Application

Our Doctrine: Salvation is from the LORD!

We’re not even half-way through the gospel of John yet and what do we find? Jesus is telling us the same thing over and over again. The summary of this passage can be found in v.9 “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” Jesus says that everlasting life comes only through Him. Jesus says that only in Him will we find safety and satisfaction. That’s what He means by going in and out and finding pasture. *In* the sheepfold we find we are protected by the Shepherd, and as He leads us *out* we find good food and clean water, the things we need for growth and happiness. Every other shepherd will only lead to death.

But we’ve already heard this. This is the repeated message of John.

**John 4:14** “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.”

**John 5:24** “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

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<sup>8</sup> Historically there have been many false messiahs. In the book of Acts we see the end that they bring. Acts 5:36-37 For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered.

**John 6:35** “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

**John 7:37-38** “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”

Why does Jesus repeat Himself over and over again? Salvation is from the Lord! We get it! Or do we? Here’s the thing about being sheep: we forget that we are absolutely and utterly dependent on the shepherd. We forget that we are sheep. We begin to try to look for ways through the fence.

Phillip Keller a former shepherd turned pastor reports of this beautiful ewe lamb that he once owned. She far exceeded all her peers in her appearance and her ability to produce offspring. He had no sheep that was her equal. But she had one serious flaw. She was a fence crawler. Even though Keller kept his pasture lush and green, she was always trying to get through the fence to the brown and burnt pastures beyond. She forgot that she was completely dependent upon her shepherd’s care.

And this is what all of us do. We forget that as sheep. We start to believe that there is something different about us. We say to ourselves “We’re different. We’re better. We belong to the shepherd because we have performed.

I received a precious email this week from a person who was struggling with the assurance of her salvation. She feels the constant nuisance of her flesh, those nose flies that all sheep face. She said this

“I worry a lot about my salvation and its frustrating because **I love God**, I really do and he is the one thing that makes me able to live through all the drama going on in the world right now even though I struggle a lot **I still love him** and I do my best...”

‘I do my best.’ This statement, I believe exemplifies the tension that all of us feel. “We do our best.” Do we? No we don’t. Sheep do not graduate from

being sheep. The only thing that sheep do their best at is being helpless. Salvation is from the LORD! Jesus is repeating Himself again to remind us of this. The message that salvation is from the LORD isn't for our atheistic Uncle, or our belligerent co-worker, or our neighbor, or the person sitting next to us. It is for us. And if we try to say to ourselves "Yeah I get it!" Do we? Did we walk in perfect harmony with Christ this week with Christ? No. Then we have forgotten that we are sheep.

## Our Duty: Don't forget that we are sheep (Don't forget the gospel)

Please turn with me to 2 Peter 1. [**Pew Bible...**]

[1] Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:

[2] May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

[3] His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, [4] by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. [5] For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, [6] and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, [7] and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. [8] For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9] **For whoever lacks these qualities** is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

Notice the weight of this last verse in connection with v.5-7. Peter is saying in v. 5-7 to add all of these things to our faith—virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. And then in v.9, he tells us that if we lack these qualities it is because we have forgotten the gospel! “For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, *having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.*”

Did you lack any of these qualities this week? I did. What does that mean? It means that we have forget that we are sheep.

Sheep do this all the time. There’s a old term that shepherd’s use called “cast sheep.” A sheep becomes cast when they forget that their backsides weigh more than their feet. They lie down in a comfortable spot. But they get to comfortable in themselves. They think they are safe and they put their feet out to their sides and then the weight of their backs teeters them over. And they become completely stuck. If the shepherd doesn’t come and turn them over, the gasses will build up in their abdomen cutting off their circulation and they will die.

So what is Peter trying to do in this text? Remind us that we are sheep. Look what he says just a couple verses later in v.12, he says “Therefore I intend *always to remind you,*” v.13 “I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up *by way of reminder,*” v.15 “And I will *make every effort* so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.” What is he reminding us of? The gospel! **We have been cleansed of our sins,** *not* because of who we are, but because [v.1] we “...have obtained a faith...by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” and that [v.3] “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,”

How can we tell if we have forgotten that we are sheep? How can we tell if we have forgotten the gospel? Do you lack any of those qualities in v.5-7: virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love? Yes! How do we fix it? Buckle down? Try harder? Do more? Trust in our theology? Trust in the church we go to, or the books we are reading. Or

perhaps the way to gain these virtues is through asceticism. Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. We'll stop hanging out with those friends, or get rid of our media, or eat the right foods or exercise. Or perhaps we just need to read more Bible, or pray harder, or start a family worship plan. Those things will work right? No. Sheep will never be anything but helpless sheep. They cannot help themselves. They must look to the Shepherd. They must look to Christ. The main issue in Peter's mind is that the sheep have forgotten that they have been cleansed from their former sins.

Gordon MacDonald has served as a prominent pastor and writer in American Evangelicalism for over fifty years. He was the president of InterVarsity, and had a massive influence in the church. He's still alive today. But Dr. MacDonald had an affair with his church secretary. He lost his ministry. It was very traumatic and shook a lot of people. By God's grace he was able to reconcile with his wife. Dr. MacDonald demonstrated the kind of repentance like King David in Psalm 51. Well a few years ago, Joe Novenson, pastor of Lookout Mountain Presbyterian church contacted Dr. MacDonald and asked if he could take him to dinner. At the end of their dinner, Joe asked him: "Dr. MacDonald, how could a man like you, who loves Jesus as much as you do, who believes the gospel as much as you do...who had a rich ministry...how in the world could you have done what you did?" Dr. MacDonald replied "Joe, you're a Calvinist right." Joe said "Yes sir." Dr. MacDonald said "So you understand that there is enough evil in your heart to destroy the world three times over right?" Joe said "Yes sir." Then he said "Joe I didn't believe that about myself, and that's why I fell."

Dr. MacDonald forgot that he was cleansed from his former sins. His great ministry—his multiple books—his multiple sermons—his disciplined life could not stop him from falling when he forgot that truth. Your performance will not stop you from sinning. Your circumstances, your theology, your job, your family, your church cannot save you. Those shepherds will fail every time.

Jesus is again and again reminding us that salvation is from the Lord in all of life.

## Our Delight: Christ our Shepherd *is* our abundant life

Jesus says in v.10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Jesus could have just stopped halfway through that verse. “I came that they may have life.” Stop. Isn’t that enough? Everlasting life? Christians are never going to die. We have been rescued from the thief, and murderer destroyer of our souls. We’re safe. Christ has made us safe through His death on the cross, paying for our sins, and giving us all the righteousness that we will ever need to stand before the Father. Isn’t that enough? No. We weren’t redeemed to just be safe from the thief. We need something more. The gospel is not good news if we only have mere existence, mere safety. What good would eternal life be if we got to heaven and we weren’t happy? Our hearts long for happiness, for joy, for fulfillment, for an overflowing life. And that is what Christ promises. “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” ‘I came that my sheep might have more than what is necessary, exceeding, abundant, all-surpassing life.’

**Address the non-believer...** If you are not trusting in Christ for your salvation, you will be stolen from, killed and destroyed. You just are trusting in something. And Jesus say that if you trust in something other than him, you will be destroyed. Turn to the Good Shepherd. Don’t resist Him. Repent of your sins and place your trust in Him alone. The Scripture says “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

**To the church...** For the rest of us. Beloved. This is the happy gospel for helpless sheep. Jesus promises abundant life, because He promises Himself. That is what we gain ultimately when we are saved. The Good Shepherd. The sheep are not happy *mainly* because of the stuff that they have, but because they are in the presence of the Shepherd. “You make known to me the path of life; in

your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” (Psalm 16:11)

## Prayer

Isaiah 53:6

